

ASG celebrating the joy of early learning

early horizons

VOLUME 6 ISSUE 1 2017

**Tackling bullying
in early childhood**

STEM in the early years

The Danish
Forest School
approach




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100009457


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Children need
real life, first hand
experiences

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From our CEO

JOHN VELEGRINIS



Welcome to this issue of *Early Horizons*.

As the weather is getting colder in our part of the world, in the northern hemisphere the children are playing outdoors for a longer period of time as the sun shines brightly on them.

Research tells us that children learn best in informal surroundings and in the past decade the Scandinavian method of teaching has gained popularity worldwide. Jane Williams-Siegfredsen shares with us why outdoor play is so important for a child's creativity and critical thinking.

As the child's first formal educator you wear many hats and although most of the time you love the children in your care, there are times when you have to be firm. One such instance is when you spot bullying among your preschoolers, which can be done knowingly or otherwise. Bullying can severely affect a child's future wellbeing and should be stopped as soon as it is detected. Professor Michael Bernard, founder YCDI, school principal Heather Leary and SEL trainer Leah Kohn explain how you can equip young children with the inner strengths they need to cope.

At ASG we recognise the exceptional work you do in creating our future generation and on 9 March we recognised 13 inspirational Australian teachers for excellence in teaching at the ASG's National Excellence in Teaching Awards (NEiTA). These teachers were nominated by parents, school councils, parent associations, committees of management, secondary student councils and community organisations.

Of the 13, four were early childhood educators whose work has touched the lives of many young people in their care. Meet these inspiring early childhood educators.

Nominations for the 2017 ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards are now open in Australia and in New Zealand. Why not encourage the parents of your centre and the community to nominate a fabulous educator? To nominate go to: www.asg.com.au/nominate and www.asg.com.au/nz/neita

Natalie Bell, a 2016 ASG NEiTA recipient from New Zealand, believes in positively engaging children in education through their passions and strengths. She maintains her enthusiasm for teaching by becoming their trusted companion. Read how Natalie allows children to be children and trusts in their abilities.

Lyn Cleaver, a 2016 ASG NEiTA recipient recognises that each student is embarking on a unique learning journey and personalises education through daily goal setting and conferencing. She uses circle time as a means to develop social skills, strong relationships, confidence and deep thinkers, and shares her strategy with us.

Along with balancing ICT teaching and learning tools, John Williams—another 2016 ASG NEiTA recipient—has successfully driven social engagement projects in the form of twice weekly games clubs for students experiencing social difficulties. This has resulted in cooperation, taking turns and conflict resolution among his students, and the community nominating him for a national award.

A child's natural curiosity and their need to explore make them the perfect target for teaching STEM in the early years. There are many opportunities for STEM in our daily life and the trick is to recognise these moments of learning and discovery. Sarah Denholm's free downloadable iBook will show you how to conduct STEM in everyday classroom.

Looking after so many children daily can be stressful. ASG's *You Can Do It! Education's Stress management for teachers and principals* is a best practice professional development program created especially for teachers and educators like yourself. The program will help make your work life more enjoyable.

ASG NEiTA 2015 recipient, Galina Zenin also conducts wellness programs for educators because it is "important to focus on educators' wellbeing ... How can we improve children's mental and physical health if we are not supporting adults?"

We hope you enjoy reading the articles in this issue. Do stay warm in the coming months and we will see you again in spring.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Velegrinis'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

John Velegrinis
Chief Executive Officer, ASG

Tackling bullying in early childhood

This article is by Heather Leary, School Campus Principal, Benalla K-12 College (Victoria), Leah Kohn, Student Counsellor, Lefevre Peninsula Primary School (South Australia), and Professor Michael E. Bernard, PhD, The University of Melbourne.

Bullying, which occurs in the early years can severely affect not only the victims but also the perpetrators. The good news is that by working together (teachers, parents and children) we can reduce its occurrence and equip young children with the inner strengths they need to cope.

What are the early signs of bullying?

The media and an individual's personal experiences have a significant impact on how people typically view bullying and therefore, how they tend to deal with it. Parents in particular tend to use this term loosely and refer to any type of friendship issue or harassment as bullying. In our experience it is vital to educate parents, students and staff around what bullying really is.

Bullying is an ongoing and repetitive misuse of power in a relationship that causes physical and / or psychological harm. Bullying comes in different forms—verbal, physical, cyber, social isolation or exclusion etc.

It can be very difficult to recognise signs of bullying in very young children. However, three, four and five year olds are not too small and innocent to exhibit bullying behaviour. There are many reasons for this. Children:

- » exhibit behaviours that they have witnessed in their family or community environment
- » act aggressively or meanly if they have been treated harshly at home by significant adults in their lives

- » may have played (or watched) violent video games, which also has a detrimental effect on their behaviour
- » may have been spoilt by over indulgent parents and truly believe they are the centre of the universe—never expected to share or care for others
- » have an aggressive temperament and are quick to hurt others if things don't go their way.

Pushing, hitting, kicking, swearing, put downs and bullying can be just as evident in a preschool environment as they are in a primary or secondary school setting.

Part of educating parents (and staff) about bullying is being very clear about what is and isn't bullying behaviour. There may be a one off incident where a child is teased or harassed, however this is not bullying.

Everyone in the community needs to be made aware of zero tolerance, anti-bullying guidelines and policies, through meetings, newsletters and the procedures that will be followed if such behaviour occurs.

What you can do to curb bullying

It is unrealistic to believe that there can ever be a bully free school. Sadly, bullying behaviour can rear its ugly head in any place where humans gather (big and little humans)—at home, at kindergarten, at school, the workforce, politics and in the community. However, we can strive for and actively promote a 'zero tolerance to bullying' in preschool,

and this is achievable with a united approach. We can also help young children to remain calm and take action when it occurs.

Having regular information in class and school newsletters about what constitutes bullying, sharing grievance procedures with the community, participating in annual events such as the National Day of Action Against Bullying and Violence, and Harmony Day are all important steps in developing a culture that does not tolerate such behaviour.

Clear guidelines and expectations need to be set so that every staff member is aware of their professional obligations and responsibilities to provide a safe and nurturing environment for young children to grow and flourish.

Posters around the wall send strong messages to key stakeholders that their school is a happy and safe place to learn and grow, and everyone has a responsibility to contribute to that—even if you are only three!

Tackling bullying is a team approach: how and what will you tell parents if their child is the bully or a victim?

Honesty is the best policy.

- » At the beginning of every year, it is good to reinforce to parents the importance of working together.
- » Reassure them that they can come and talk to you about any of their concerns or issues—not just the good stuff!!



-
- » The communication is two way, so inform them that you will also contact them if you have any issues that you feel they need to be addressed.

No one wants to hear that their child is being a bully and neither do they want to hear that their child is a victim. Parents also quickly realise the importance of teaching their children not become bystanders either.

Talking to parents of a child who is bullying is easier when you first acknowledge that both of you want the same outcome for their child—happy and successful. Talk about the child's strengths and positive attributes, and also let parents know that kids who bully are generally unhappy, don't have many friends, they don't get asked to birthday parties and sleepovers because other kids don't like them or are scared of them.

You can set up a management plan, which can be used both at home and at school so the child gets consistent messages that their behaviour is unacceptable. Suggest strategies parents can use to help their child calm down when they are angry.

- » rewards for pro-social behaviour and acknowledgement of every little step towards success.
- » monitor the child's behaviour carefully and meet regularly.
- » if progress is not being made in a timely manner, suggest therapeutic intervention and refer them—when necessary—to a child psychologist.

How to work with parents?

Parents are often relieved to have someone on their side—eager to work collaboratively towards a successful outcome—as children display similar behaviours at home.

However, some parents will be angry and defensive as they may believe you are picking on their child and exaggerating the bullying behaviour. Macho dads can often set their sons up to be bullies by telling them at home that it's okay to hit

another kid, no matter what the rules are at the kindergarten.

Bullying can have lifelong consequences. How do you teach preschoolers not to bully?

Children need to be explicitly taught their roles and responsibilities. We have had great success teaching preschoolers that it is never okay to be a bully, never okay to be a victim, and never okay to be a bystander.

Educating young children around this topic is also important and you can start by using picture books to reinforce this message. There are a wide range of books that focus on this message (*Jungle Bullies* and *The Recess Queen* are two good examples). Stories, role plays, puppet shows, and little video clips can be used to teach these concepts to very little children.

What coping mechanisms would you teach three to five year olds?

Preschoolers need to be taught that if someone treats them badly, they need to tell their perpetrator 'STOP IT! I DON'T LIKE IT!' They need to stand up strong and tall and say the words in a loud and confident voice (lots of role play and practice).

The fabulous puppets from the YCDI! Education Early Childhood program can be used to teach young children how to be confident (Connie Confidence). Some children seem to be much more in tune with the puppet characters 'dealing' with an incident of bullying and giving out reminders rather than the educators. The Ricky Resilience puppet helps to explain to children the importance of staying calm when things go wrong. The self talk that Ricky uses and models for young children is: 'When I am upset, it is good to think "calm down—take three big breaths" and "When I am upset, it is good to think "I'll find a grown up to talk to", are clear examples that you

can teach young children the strategies to use in a difficult situation.


Teach kids that if they don't ask for help, then they are letting the bully be the winner. Being strong and confident and thinking 'I'm not going to let him get away with this, he is being a bully,' makes YOU the winner, not them!

Also, every child needs to be taught that they have a job to do. We teach kids that being a bystander is not okay either. They need to report any bad behaviour to a grown up immediately because if they don't do anything about it, then they are letting the bully be the winner, and he will continue being a bully until we teach him a better way to behave.

Our final message is ...

We need explicit policies and practices—both in our preschools and home—that clearly communicate that our preschool is a happy and safe place to learn and grow and that bullying will not be tolerated. Also, as children of all ages are emotionally vulnerable when faced with repeated acts of teasing, exclusion and physical aggression, we have a responsibility to teach them a variety of coping skills—assertion, relaxation, find support—and ways to think—'I am proud of who I am no matter what'—that help protect and empower them to handle all forms of anti-social behaviour.

Make it fun! Make it real! Get everyone involved and make a difference!!



Children need to be explicitly taught their roles and responsibilities.

Trusted companion

This article is by Natalie Bell from the Maungaarangi Kindergarten—mountain in the sky—in Tauranga, New Zealand. Natalie has been teaching for more than 20 years and she wants to help and support children to positively engage in education through their passions and strengths. Natalie maintains her enthusiasm by the journeys she has had, and still has with the children she teaches.



I like to push boundaries of what society deems to be dangerous, as I believe that children have a greater ability than we give them credit for. So, I allow my students to examine and experience—with me—those places that we believe we should protect them from, e.g. climbing a tree as high as they can, riding down a steep hill on their bikes, being able to use power tools, and using real resources that we teachers use.

Research tells us that babies—even before birth—seek companionship and engagement with another. A trusted companion is one with whom the children have a relationship, who is paying attention, is deeply interested, and shares the thinking and intention of the children. They are willing to go to the hard place—both physically and emotionally—with the child.

We also know the important role teachers play in supporting and encouraging children who are risk takers. It has been recognised that children who keep on trying become successful lifelong learners and this concept excites me.

Bike riding and risk taking

I am a motocross endure rider and my partner and I ride whenever we can. I did my research on risk taking, and introduced bike riding in my kindergarten. Initially it was about showing the boys that girls can ride too, and when I rode my bike to the kindergarten the boys didn't just see me as a teacher but as one of them. It also made me a bit cooler!

There were risks involved and initially some children were scared when I started this initiative but with the right gear and lessons this fear subsided. We bought second hand bikes from a local recycling centre and had them checked for suitability. In a short time the children developed their own self-belief to do amazing things and be brave when things didn't quite work out the way they wanted it to.

Boys, more than girls, need the extra adrenaline pump and we had some big boys in our kindergarten. Some of these students had many issues, so this idea of the trusted companion and risk taking helped them.

Some of the boys also took big risks and found their spot in the pecking order. They became *rangatira* or leaders for children who were not so confident or capable. This led to empathy, as the bigger boys would ride faster to check if the other children were okay when they fell down.

I wanted these boys to succeed and not be labelled as hard or unteachable. Through risk taking these boys left our kindergarten and headed to school with empathy and leadership skills.

Embedding a 'trusted companion' approach in education

We have also used the trusted companion tool when working with our more demanding children. A teacher spends quality time solely with one child every day—be it be five minutes or 30. The child determines the time, place and how this time will be spent. With time another teacher is introduced into the child's sphere and at the child's discretion they choose a peer to join their game. This has worked well with



our children and with the support from the team and the *whānau* it has lifted everyone's wellbeing.

As part of our trusted companion concept we grew edible gardens in our kindergarten to illustrate the interconnectedness of living things. Maungaarangi Kindergarten is a magical place with a large outdoor space, a lovely hill and a beautiful fruit forest with different varieties of trees.

The garden was designed by a student undertaking a diploma in permaculture, which we named *Te Pa Huarakau o Maungaarangi*, the place of fruit. The garden produces fresh fruit for our children and their *whānau*. We also received a grant from the Bay of Plenty council to support our work.

We are teaching the children the concept of companion planting with our fruit

trees and encourage parents to donate fruit trees and seedlings when their child leaves our kindergarten.

We also reviewed our kindergarten's birthday policy and invited the *whānau* to offer trees and plants instead of cakes. This fits in with hauhora/nutrition team appraisal.

Although we use the *Te Whariki*, we predominantly use local *purakau* (legends) pertaining to this area while doing assessments on our *tamariki* (children). This allows the children and their *whānau* to see the connection in stories and legends and soon the children start comparing themselves to *Otanewainuku*, the strong mountain.

We have had an excellent review from the Education Review Office and are constantly building on what we have and where we need to go.

Lessons learnt

- » Risk taking made *rangatira* or leaders out of boys who started helping the children who were less confident or capable.
- » The boys developed empathy and leadership skills through risk taking.
- » Children have faith in the learning system and themselves, and compare themselves to *Otanewainuku*

Natalie is a 2016 ASG NEiTA recipient and her national award was for Innovation. Natalie has received a two-year scholarship for a postgraduate diploma in specialist teaching, which is supported by the New Zealand Ministry of Education.



Through risk taking these boys left our kindergarten and headed to school with empathy and leadership skills.



The Danish Forest School approach

The Danish education system is renowned for its innovative teaching methods and informal learning environments, which promote creativity and critical thinking among students.



The practice of using the outdoors as a part of the education and all round development is not a new phenomenon in Denmark. But it has only been recently that an international interest has been taken in understanding the benefits to children.

The Danish Forest School has come about through a number of influences such as:

- » The pedagogical theories that have influenced present day practice
- » The training and role of educators working in early years settings (educators are called pedagogues)
- » The physical environment of settings
- » The organisation of early years settings
- » The research that highlights the long-term benefits of children being outdoors.

The Danish Forest School has been inspired by the work of pioneers such as Friedrich Froebel, who opened the first kindergarten in 1840. In 1854 a Danish headmaster opened a play and preparatory kindergarten for young children in Copenhagen—believing that childhood is a special time when children develop their character and knowledge. He believed that education for young children should be child-centred to match their developmental characteristics.

For Froebel, the kindergarten was a garden for children to flourish and grow.

From those early beginnings seven pedagogical principles of practice have developed.

1 A holistic approach to children's learning and development

This approach is concerned with the development of every child's intellectual, emotional, social, physical, creative and spiritual potential. It seeks to engage children in the learning process and encourages personal and collective responsibility.

2 Each child is unique and competent

Every child is unique and competent in their own way, and the way they think, feel and interact with others reflects this. Some children are outgoing, while some are shy; some like physical activities, while others love stories and music. To view the child as unique and competent is to view their potential. Children need an environment to flourish and grow their positive self-esteem.

3 Children are active and interactive learners

Children's active engagement in the learning process and their engagement with others in interactive activities or engagement with materials forms the dynamics for knowledge and understanding. Through active learning children

are constantly changing, adjusting, and rearranging meaning and understanding of things.

4 Children need real life, first hand experiences

Children are observers and explorers by nature and through real-life, first hand experiences they develop an understanding of themselves and the environment they are in. A child's all round physical, emotional, linguistic, cognitive and sensory development is fostered through first hand experiences.

5 Children thrive in child centred environments

This environment takes into account children's daily lives—including the need for restful areas, places for children who need sleep-time and creative areas. There should be an interconnectedness between indoors and outdoors, and an understanding that children need to be in harmony with the environment.

6 Children need time to experiment and develop independent thinking

Children need time to play and explore and experiment with their ideas and knowledge. They need to try things out, make mistakes, try something else, repeat their play, and consolidate ideas.

7 Learning comes from social interactions

Children experience positive social relationships through daily interactions with responsive and affectionate adults. This helps children develop self-confidence, to communicate and master challenges in their world.

There is no one type of 'forest school' in Denmark. Each setting varies depending on where they are situated (rural, semi rural or urban) and according to the people using them (pedagogues, children and parents)—no two are the same.

There are kindergartens in the woodlands, which are referred to as forest or nature kindergartens. In these settings the natural surroundings provide the starting point for activities inside or outside—either the whole or significant part of the day, every day or all year round.

Sometimes things are discovered and investigated by the pedagogues and children in the natural outdoor surroundings. At other times things may be brought inside the kindergarten for full discussion and investigation. Most of these forest and nature kindergartens are relatively small with 20-30 children and four to five pedagogues, though a few are much larger with 100 children.

Not all kindergartens in Denmark are specific forest or nature kindergartens—many just use the outdoor area they have available. But even in these kindergartens the children are outside for a significant part of the day, all year round.

To find out more about the Danish forest schools read Jane's recently published book (second edition) *Understanding the Danish Forest School Approach*, published by Routledge.



An example of practice

It was nearly lunchtime and the children were hungry; they had a long walk in the forest and it was time to go back to the kindergarten. Suddenly the children found some bones beneath a tree and all thoughts of lunch disappeared.

They searched around the area and found more bones and brought them to the pedagogue. They talked about what kind of animals the bones were from and the pedagogue pointed out different features of the bones. Judging by its skull it was a big bird. The children named all the big birds they could think of and the pedagogue talked about the other bones: 'This is a thighbone, look at its shape. You have bones like this too; feel your thigh – can you feel the bone inside?' Nikoli was thrilled, 'I can feel my thigh bone'. The other children started to investigate their own bodies and started asking the pedagogue about the other bones in their bodies. 'Where is this one from? Have I got that kind of bone too?' The children asked what had killed the bird and scattered the bones. The pedagogue talked about the other animals in the forest and that most likely a fox had killed the bird for food. The kindergarten has stuffed animals—fox, badger, different kinds of birds etc. The children rarely see these animals but see their tracks and know about their habits. The pedagogue and the children put all the bones they found into a bag for closer inspection at the kindergarten.



Jane Williams-Sieghfredsen is an early year's practitioner, specialising in pedagogy, and outdoor play and learning in the early years. She moved to Denmark 18 years ago after being a teacher, a head teacher and a senior lecturer in early years in the UK.

Jane has been a lecturer in pedagogy, communication and leadership at the Aalborg University and at the University of West Jutland. She is now an independent consultant, trainer and Director of Inside-Out Nature—specialising in courses in Denmark and worldwide on how to develop pedagogically appropriate practices in outdoor learning environments. She has also presented at conferences and written about how children develop their skills and competencies in the outdoors.



Creating deep thinkers

The media is abundant with stories of Australian school children lagging behind in literacy and numeracy. To stem this, ACT kindergarten teacher, Lyn Cleaver encourages her kindergarten class to start reading early. She believes that early childhood teaching is not only an opportunity to educate children, but to support them and their families through the foundation years of their learning journey.

Along with reading, Lyn is also passionate about STEM and plans hands on STEM activities, open-ended rich assessment tasks, and problem solving design tasks for her students.

Lyn's aim is for every child to become thoughtful and reflective readers. To achieve this she follows a reading workshop framework. "I attended Debbie Miller's presentation on *Reading Workshop* in 2014, and this helped me fine tune my literacy block to add depth to my teaching by introducing the 'why' of reading," Lyn says.

Debbie Miller's workshops are about modelling and teaching children what good readers do, and engaging and motivating children to want to read. The workshops are structured around mini lessons (15 to 20 minutes) and a large block of time to read, respond and confer (40 to 45 minutes). The workshop provides a framework for strategy instruction and the gradual release of responsibility.

Setting a goal for deep thinking

At the beginning of each year circle time is planned and frequently presented for students to get to know their peers and feel comfortable in their new classroom environment. The



whole class sits in a community circle and verbally share ideas and students are expected to participate and listen to their peers.

"During circle time the school's core values of cooperating, understanding diversity, respecting and supporting others underpin our classroom atmosphere," Lyn says. "My students understand that it is okay to have differing thoughts and are encouraged to have their own opinions."

Lyn's goal is to create thoughtful and reflective readers and to achieve this she follows the reading workshop model. "I am explicit in telling my students the learning intention and the reasons why we need to learn. I then model the targeted reading strategy to my students with examples of what it looks like, at the same time discussing, speculating and challenging their thinking. I confer with individual students, checking and questioning them on what they are doing, why they are doing, and why it is important for them to know. During sharing time students articulate what they have learnt and how they got smarter, e.g. 'I can create mental images to retell stories'"

For Lyn deep thinkers are observant and insightful learners and it develops independence and confidence in the children. By offering her students a choice in books, materials and activities, Lyn engages her students and promotes ownership in their learning. She delivers a program, which provides high quality,



rich literature—with processes in place—to assist students to respond orally, through play and writing. The main purpose of reading is to understand what has been read and we want our children to be proficient in reading rather than be functional readers.

Creating a climate of deep thinking

“In my kindergarten class I purposefully plan and specifically focus on creating a climate of deep thinking,” Lyn says. “I encourage building positive relationships, where students feel safe to take risks and challenge their thinking and learning.

“I realise that each student is embarking on their own unique learning journey and so the reading activities are planned for each group of students based on their point of need and the skills they need to move forward.” In the early stages the complexities of the English language may bog down some students—as decoding is difficult for them. It is crucial that reading comprehension strategies be taught alongside learning about letters and words as language learning takes place through meaningful interactions and experiences.

“By providing my students a rich language and literature—both in the classroom and at home—has assisted them in understanding how words and language go together. There is a clear link between oral literacy and reading and writing development. Oral literacy is given a higher priority in my classroom where students are asked to respond, share and present their ideas.”



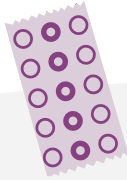
Lyn Cleaver is a kindergarten teacher at Gowrie Primary School in ACT. She is a 2016 ASG NEITA recipient and her national award was for Innovation.

Outcome

“In my kindergarten class I purposefully plan and focus on creating a climate of deep thinking by building positive relationships where my students feel safe to take risks and are challenged in their thinking and learning.” There is a high level of student engagement and self-confidence with Lyn’s students participating in all classroom activities—including specific role in cooperative learning groups.

Lyn’s top tips

- » Inform your students about the learning intention and the reasons why they need to learn.
- » Model the targeted strategy to your students with examples of what it looks like, at the same time discussing and challenging their thinking.
- » Plan and focus on creating a climate of deep thinking by building positive relationships, where students feel safe to take risks and challenge their thinking and learning.
- » Plan your activities based on students’ point of need and the skills they need to move forward.
- » Encourage your students to respond, share and present their ideas.



“In my kindergarten class I purposefully plan and specifically focus on creating a climate of deep thinking.”



ASG NEiTA 2016 early childhood award recipients

Meet our inspiring early childhood recipients



EMMA LARSEN

Emma Larsen from Avenel Kindergarten in Victoria is a lead kindergarten teacher. She is a passionate believer that education extends beyond the classroom walls and integrates the community.

"In a small town, a kindergarten serves as more than a place of learning—it is a gathering point, a meeting place for families and a social hub.

In conjunction with an open invitation for the community to participate and contribute to our programming, and a service culture that values families as the first educators has helped create a family centred environment that I am really proud to have worked in."

Emma Larsen's greatest achievement has been dramatically increasing the number of enrolments at the kindergarten and introducing a play based indoor-outdoor program that allows for extended periods of uninterrupted play where children are encouraged to take risks, explore and imagine.

Emma's National Award was for Early Career Teaching.



JOHN WILLIAMS

John Williams from Wheeler Heights Public School (Collaroy Plateau) is a kindergarten teacher and assistant principal. His greatest strength is building strong personal relationships with all members of the school community.

Educating children in all stages throughout his 15 year career, John Williams has identified three 'significant truths', which underpin his daily teaching practices and guides his priorities to positively influence the students in his care.

His core beliefs are developing and supporting quality teachers to positively influence student engagement and outcomes, establishing genuine rapport and relationships, and equipping students with understanding and skills to ensure they become successful learners and confident and creative individuals in an era of rapid change and development.

John's National Award was for Leadership and Development and Community Engagement.



LYN CLEAVER

Lyn Cleaver from Gowrie Primary School, in Canberra says exposing young children to high quality literature is critical to engaging and motivating children to want to learn how to read.

“When considering that some students come from backgrounds where there are few books and adult reading role models, it is imperative that the classroom is set up to expose students to those crucial elements. Students need to hear quality literature to know how language sounds, to increase vocabulary, and expand their knowledge of words.

In the early stages of reading, some students get bogged down in the complexities of the English language and decoding is quite difficult for them. It is essential that reading comprehension strategies be taught alongside learning about letters and words.”

Lyn’s National Award was for Innovation.



TRACEY MARSDEN

Tracey Marsden from Yidarra Catholic Primary School in Western Australia is a firm believer in the holistic approaches to learning.

She has been instrumental in her school’s kindergarten philosophy of ‘learning how to learn’ through cultivating the personal, social, emotional, physical and spiritual dimensions of very young children through a holistic model of education.

The kindergarten has been selected, as a ‘Centre of Excellence’ for the upcoming Early Childhood Learning and Development Conference where delegates will be able to observe their daily kindergarten practices such as open morning tea time—an initiative which gives young children the freedom to continue learning and playing in their environment without the constant interruptions of traditional regimented routines.

Each child chooses when they would like to visit the Kindy Café during opening hours, which is staffed by a teacher to engage with the children and help develop their language skills in a social and safe environment. Once finished, the child then chooses to participate in a new learning activity or returns to what they were doing.

Tracey’s National Award was for Leadership and Development.

Do you know any outstanding educators at your early learning centre?

Nominate them for the 2017 ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards (ASG NEiTA).

Australia

Go to asg.com.au/neita for more information on how to nominate.

For general enquiries call **1800 624 487**

Nominations close **3 July 2017**

New Zealand

Go to asg.co.nz/neita for more information on how to nominate.

For general enquiries call **09 308 0576**

Nominations close **22 June 2017**



2017 ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards (ASG NEiTA)

Recognising and rewarding outstanding educators in the community

Do you know any outstanding educators at your **early learning centre**? Nominate them for an ASG National Excellence in Teaching Award.

For Australia
Go to asg.com.au/neita for more information on how to nominate.
For general enquiries call **1800 624 487**

Nominations open: **3 April 2017**
Nominations close: **3 July 2017**

For New Zealand
Go to asg.co.nz/neita for more information on how to nominate.
For general enquiries call **09 308 0576**

Nominations open: **27 March 2017**
Nominations close: **22 June 2017**

Q&A with Galina Zenin

Music is quintessential to Galina Zenin, who works hard to bring the joys of song and melody to early learners.



A 2015 ASG NEITA (National Excellence in Teaching Awards) recipient, Galina grew up in Russia, where she studied at the Gnessin Russian Academy of Music and then taught music in primary schools. She says teaching children through music builds social bonds and enlivens the soul.

What motivated you to become an early childhood educator?

My interest in early years development started when my second child was born and I started learning nursery rhymes and games. I realised soon that many schools and early childhood services did not have a big focus on music and musical experiences. So to make music accessible and affordable for all families, I opened Australia's first dedicated music kinder in 2006—Bonkers Beat in Brighton East in Melbourne. We opened another centre in Aspendale in Melbourne in 2009.

What have you gained by being part of early education?

The early years of a child's development are the most crucial. It is the time when educators and parents can enhance children's brain development and make an enormous impact on their future.

Teaching young children is very rewarding, as sometimes, we can see a big shift or change in a child's behaviour very quickly, which really excites me. Think of teenagers ... sometimes it takes a long time to see the results of our hard work. With young children, we may see big changes in their attitude, confidence, social-emotional development and other areas over a short period of time. I love seeing the evidences of mine and other educators' work, and this motivates me even more.

I never thought that my interest in the early years brain development will continue to grow and I'll become an expert in early childhood education.

You have brought about changes to your centre, which culminated in the community recognising your work. How do you feel about it?

I love new ideas and positive changes. I also dream big and work hard to achieve my goals. At times, people think that my ideas are crazy and I say, bonkers ...

However, whatever I have in mind, I'm very clear and always know 'why' the new idea is important and 'why' we should try it. I am blessed that I work with educators and parents who believe in me and support me.

Being recognised and nominated by parents for ASG NEITA was an honour and I will always be grateful for their nominations.

How did you exceed the National Quality Standards (NQS)?

It is always a great feeling when you are recognised for your hard work and commitment towards children's development. But for our team the NQS assessment has never been the main goal.

My personal vision is to provide the best education and care to every child, every day. And that's why Bonkers Beat Music and Wellbeing programs are designed to be incorporated and imbedded into the curriculum. That's why our educators run music, yoga, meditation and a range of other wellbeing practices on a daily basis.

Did this reflect in the NQS assessment and boost our rating? Absolutely!

Is this the main reason why we do it? No!



I'm very clear and always know 'why' the new idea is important and 'why' we should try it.

Tell us about your Wellness programs

Along with focussing on children's wellbeing, it's also important to focus on educators' wellbeing as the wellbeing of young children is in the educators' and parents' hands. How can we improve children's mental and physical health if we are not supporting adults? To create a healthy and happy future generation we should look after our own wellbeing, and our Wellness programs tackle both in one holistic approach.

We empower educators and families by providing them with practical and inspiring training opportunities. Education is the key to connect, grow together and create a happy and harmonious world.

Why is this program so important for educators?

According to research conducted by beyondblue one in six young Australian is currently experiencing anxiety, and one in four young Australian currently has a mental health condition.

Research conducted by The Melbourne Graduate School of Education, Deakin University, RMIT and The Jack Brockhoff Child

Health and Wellbeing Program also revealed that between six to 38 per cent of educators in the Family Day Care met the criteria for depression. Their mental health was seen to influence care quality given to children, and the children attending their facilities.

Learning and practicing wellbeing daily is not a choice or luxury any more—it is essential for educators, families and children.

What do educators gain from the wellness program?

Educators improve their own wellbeing, self-esteem and confidence. They develop skills to regulate their thoughts and emotions, and they become calmer and in control of their life.

Our wellness programs have received a very positive response and have been conducted in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne. In July we are planning an Early Childhood Leaders Wellbeing Retreat and you can find out about our upcoming programs and events by visiting our website BonkersBeat.com or by emailing info@BonkersBeat.com

Setting up a family day care

Most families are familiar with child care centres, but not many are aware of family day care, which offer a home based care environment for children.

GINA KILPATRICK

According to Family Day Care Australia almost half a million children are looked after in family day care so setting up one makes sense.

All long day cares, family day cares, outside school hours care, pre-Prep and kindergarten services are regulated by the National Quality Framework and the same policies apply to all these services as childcare centres.

A family day care (FDC) educator must have a minimum qualification of Certificate III in early childhood. They follow the same curriculum as the Long Day Care and Out of School Hours, including Being, Belonging and Becoming – the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF).

A home based educator can provide education and care for up to four children of preschool age and under, and no more than seven children—including their own—at any one time, except in emergency circumstances.



Some benefits of Family Day Care are:

- » provide care for children aged between six weeks and 13 years
- » home based care with educators looking after children in their homes
- » have open ended and flexible hours for parents (between 6.30am to 6.30pm)
- » have educators who can teach children any time of the day
- » follow the same curriculum as the EYLF
- » have a limit on the number of children in their care with one-on-one learning
- » children have the flexibility to play, eat and sleep when they need it
- » educators come from diverse backgrounds, which helps if parents want their children to speak a particular language
- » educators provide services around specific themes and skills, which are play based learning e.g. science and music
- » educators are able to take children on outings based on their interests
- » educators are independent contractors who own their business and can promote their business and additional skills
- » parents are charged on the hours of care booked.





All FDCs have to be registered with an approved FDC service, which has one or more coordinators to support, monitor and train the service's educators.

The FDC service providers have some important functions, including:

- » coordinating the licensing and resource provisions when a FDC is being set up
- » vetting educators who have to prove their suitability to establish their homes as a FDC
- » connecting the service to communities by disseminating and explaining government policies on childcare
- » helping the government mandate in the delivery of childcare services to the community
- » acting as the custodian/enforcer of regulations as set out in the national standards
- » implementing policy changes
- » facilitating payment to educators through interconnected processes
- » facilitating access to childcare benefit for parents.

If you are passionate about childcare and would like to set up your own FDC you need to know the following:

Suitability of the home

- » Your home will be inspected to meet requirements and safety standards as set out by the national standards and children services regulations.
- » Your home must meet requirements on a checklist, which assesses the safety of the entire property, including rest and play area and washroom facilities.

Eligibility and qualifications

- » you will need a current working with children check (employee version), police check, full first aid and anaphylaxis and asthma certificates
- » family members over 18 years living at home will need to have a police check and working with children check (volunteer version)
- » family commitment and support for you to undertake this service given the restrictions imposed on the family members
- » passion for educating and caring for children
- » ability to be able to work on your own
- » minimum Certificate 3 in early childhood education.

Business structures and systems set up

- » be able to operate as an independent contractor with ABN number, tax file number, and bank account.

More information:

files.acecqa.gov.au/files/Information_Sheets/FDC/FDCGuidanceProjectEducatorResponsibilities.pdf

www.pandafamilydaycare.net.au/



Gina Kilpatrick, an early childhood educator with 27 years of experience, is a coordinator at Panda Family Day Care. She started her career in New Zealand when her child was two years old, and continued in this profession when she moved to Melbourne 15 years ago.

Gina is passionate about children's welfare and believes that every child deserves a quality education, no matter what their circumstances are.



Educating the whole child

John Williams—a recognised leader at the Wheeler Heights Public School—works across the school on a variety of projects to ensure positive attitudes towards education and improvements in social engagements. He has driven social engagement projects with specifically targeted students experiencing social difficulties.



Teachers matter

John Hattie's research shows that outside of the students themselves, teachers have the biggest impact and make a difference in students' lives. 'It is what teachers know, do, and care about, which is very powerful in this learning equation.'

As a teacher I concentrate my energies on relationships by putting people ahead of procedures; teaching ahead of bureaucracy. In doing so, I ensure I really know my students by giving them additional time, effort and resources, and they in turn respect and trust me.

Over the many years spent in the classroom, I know that this relationship leads children to become receptive learners. Only when a student feels safe, respected and understood will they truly take the plunge into deep and

meaningful education. Only then will they take risks, step outside their comfort zone and engage in the journey.

Equip students with skills

Closely linked to the development of academic potential and passion, I also guide my students' personal characteristics—confidence, individuality, empathy and cooperation. It is important for children to believe in their own ability, understand their strengths and weaknesses, and be able to work cooperatively with others. This takes time and a lot of input but I know I have a powerful role to play.

You don't create confidence in a child by saying they can do anything in life or they are great; in fact it is the opposite. Of course, children must be praised and acknowledged for their successes but

they should also be made aware that worthwhile things requires effort and don't happen overnight. They need to realise that sometimes they will fail but through this failure they will learn, and it's the ability to bounce back that will make them resilient.

While these are big concepts for kindergarten children they must realise that each one has different strengths, weaknesses and passions. It


is never too early to teach children this and it's the relationship I build with my students, which is vital.

It is extremely rewarding to see a shy and unsure student develop a quiet confidence of their own—have the confidence to answer or pose questions, and glow with self-pride when they have mastered the task.

Why I matter to my students

My classroom is a fun and happy place and I always let my sense of humour and joy of teaching dominate my teaching. My rapport with my students means I have their respect and this helps to maximise their learning while setting high expectations from them.

It is extremely rewarding to see the development and growth of a student while they work with you over a course of a year. I have found this more evident as a kindergarten teacher and I use the analogy of a baby bird to describe this journey. When a student enters your class in February they are needy and egocentric. They are often awestruck and shy, and for most part can't read or write or have a limited understanding of basic numeracy. It is such a delight to see them develop a rich individual plumage, grow wings and learn to soar! They become capable students, demonstrate creativity and curiosity, and learn to cooperate, empathise, and believe in themselves.



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Why am I a successful educator?

My greatest strengths are relationship building and student wellbeing, and my knowledge of the curriculum and continuum is vital. I believe I do the following things well:

- » It is an injustice to treat all children equally and a good educator needs to understand and practice this mantra. The fairest way to treat your student is to treat them as individuals and focus on providing each need—when they need it—rather than treating everyone the same. Each child should be developed to the fullest potential.
- » In the classroom the curriculum, rules and expectations, basic rights and responsibilities are the same for everyone. However, within these boundaries there is also much room for individuality, for spontaneity, for differentiation, and for personalised programs and procedures. As we know life is not fair but a student of mine taught me 'Life is not fair, but it is not fair for everyone, that's what makes it so fair!' This is a big concept for a kindergarten student but a great way to help them deal with losing when playing a numeracy game, not winning an award, or when they don't receive a turn at an activity. It's unfair but we learn to smile and move on.
- » I consciously strive to empathise with my students, which helps me be the best educator I can. We must

remember that we are dealing with little human beings with their own dreams, desires, expectations and faults. We need to love them, be there for them, acknowledge each one of them, share their joy when they reach the moon, be their scaffold when they need support, and forgive them when they make mistakes.

- » I am passionate about my job and let the joy shine in my classroom and the various extracurricular activities I undertake with my students. Teaching is rewarding, entertaining, constantly varied and readily challenging. It can also be difficult, overwhelming and demanding. I learnt very early with the help of great mentors, that regular debrief with colleagues is vital for your own wellbeing. In doing so you can offload your problems by verbalising and acknowledging them and helps you remember that you have support.

Outside the classroom

White Ribbon Day

In 2015 our school community got involved in Breaking the Silence in School Program run by White Ribbon day.

The aim was to overcome the prevailing image of men as only being tough, physical, unemotional and dominant, while the women as only being weak, subjective or a sex symbol. This was done to varying depths depending on the years being taught. Looking at stereotypes in fairy tales is a great introduction for younger children.

Pink Stumps Day

The McGrath Foundation approached me in 2016 to implement a school event to support Pink Stumps Day and raise money and awareness for breast cancer. The students donated huge sums of money and looked fabulous wearing their loudest fluoro-pink outfits. The macro view revealed the building of empathy, cooperation and community among students—all of these being important life skills.

Eco-Warriors

I instigated the K-6 Eco-Warriors group as environmental sustainability is a personal passion of mine. I started by introducing chickens to the school, which promoted sustainability and responsibility. In 2015 along with some keen parents I installed a hive of native stingless bees, which added to the tapestry of the ecology and community's involvement. The hive provided a great resource for scientific study to highlight the bees' importance as pollinators.

Along with the above I have established a worm farm and composting station, and resurrected the school's vegetable garden.

The Eco-Warriors is a significant, far reaching educational project, and I have seen a genuine interest, deep knowledge, collaboration and creativity among children. These are the global citizens of tomorrow and they will go into the world as confident, informed, moral citizens during an era of rapid change.



STEM in the early years

In 2016 a group of educators from Catholic Education Western Australia explored Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) education with young children. Sarah Denholm documented and shared their journey through the publication of the *iBook STEM in the Early Years: A Journey*.

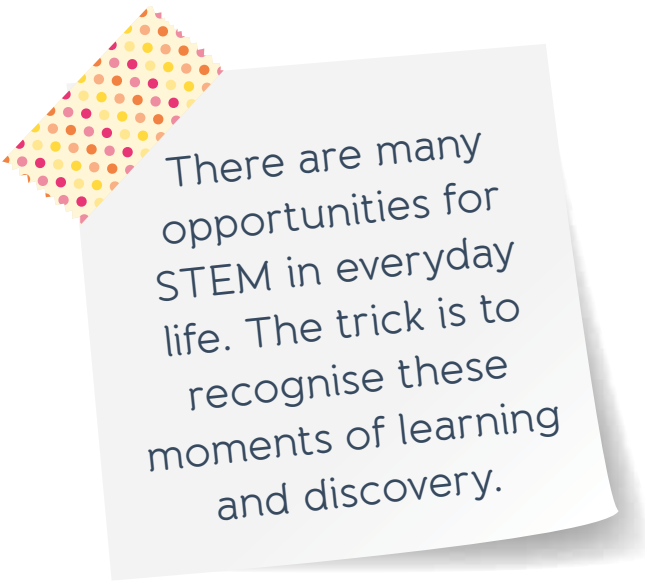
Young children are capable and competent learners who have their own theories and thinking about the world around them. Educators should acknowledge children's prior knowledge and foster their natural curiosity for STEM. Early experience with STEM helps build skills for problem solving, research, investigation, creativity, design and construction.

What research tells us about children's brains and their capacity to learn

Children learn by building on their prior knowledge and experiences. Through home and school experiences, children gather information about the world around them—how things work and why. Opportunities for children to engage in scientific thinking processes through play-based learning allow them to engage in deep thinking. When children engage in deep learning they develop skills and competencies needed for lifelong learning and thrive in today's world.

STEM in everyday life and classroom

There are many opportunities for STEM in everyday life. The trick is to recognise these moments of learning and discovery. Walking down the street brings opportunities to notice, wonder and explore.



There are many opportunities for STEM in everyday life. The trick is to recognise these moments of learning and discovery.



A carefully planned classroom environment provides an invitation for exploration and wonder about the world around us. When educators design learning environments that invite children to problem-solve, enquire, research and experiment it helps the development of skills and understanding for lifelong learning. The interdisciplinary nature of STEM learning and teaching supports educators to do this effectively.

Activities you can do with children

There are many examples of water related STEM provocations and experiences you can create for the children throughout the iBook. You can use everyday items from the classroom and home to set up provocations. Loose parts and open-ended materials create opportunities for investigation and creation.

The iBook includes a teacher's toolkit with specific resources and ideas. Having a focus on water, our teachers found that a wet area with access to liquids and resources was a great place to start. A place where children had permission to pour, tip, squeeze, drip, float and sink at their leisure led to increased engagement and curiosity about water. Items like buckets, spoons, straws, paintbrushes, ice and connecting pipes were made available for children to use in their experience and play.



What children learn

To meet the outcomes of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), there must be provision and planning for children to develop the capabilities for learning in our changing world. Educators should focus on developing children's curiosity, creativity, critical thinking and cooperative skills.

Why I published the *iBook*?

I was fortunate to work with the early childhood educators from Catholic Education WA as they began a journey into STEM education. We wanted to explore what STEM could look like with children in pre-compulsory schooling. The *iBook* shares stories of educators working in various contexts, who had different levels of teaching experiences. Together our aim was to increase STEM learning and teaching experiences and improved education outcomes for children. The *iBook* celebrates the journey of the educators to improve pedagogy practice and explore STEM in the early years. The *iBook* also showcases the capabilities and strengths of young children.

STEM in the Early Years: A Journey is available to download for free from the iTunes store: itunes.apple.com/au/book/stem-in-the-early-years/id1187113064?mt=11

Sarah Denholm is a passionate early childhood educator from Perth, Western Australia. She holds a Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood from Curtin University and a Professional Certificate of Instructional Leadership from The University of Melbourne.

Her personal educational philosophy is play based and inquiry led, and takes inspiration from the work and research from Reggio Emilia and nature pedagogy practices.

Sarah is passionate about learning environments, pedagogical documentation, and working with families and communities to make learning visible. At the time of time of the *iBook*'s publication, Sarah was working as an early childhood consultant for Catholic Education in WA. She recently moved to Melbourne and is the Director of Ruyton Early Learning at Ruyton Girls' School.



Book review



Under the Love Umbrella

by Davina Bell (*The Underwater Fancy-Dress Parade*) celebrates the joy and comfort that love can bring—wherever we roam in the big, wide world. Exquisite spot colour illustrations by Allison Colpoys accompany the heart warming, rhyming text.



A story of love and diversity—reflecting a range of backgrounds and family constellations.

Ages: 0-5

Mummies are Lovely

by Meredith Costain and Polona Lovsin is a beautiful and heart warming book about the special bond between mothers and children.



Ages: 0-5

Your chance to win one in four books

Share a story of love in your childcare centre and be in the running for one of four *Under the Love Umbrella* books and one of four *Mummies are Lovely*.

Email your story to earlyhorizons@asg.com.au

Terms and conditions:

- » One entry permitted per person or organisation.
- » Readers must send their name and/organisation and postal address to earlyhorizons@asg.com.au with 'book giveaway' in the subject line, by 15 July 2017.
- » ASG's decisions as to entries, the allocation of winners across countries, states and regions, and the declaration of winners are final and no discussion or correspondence will be entered into.
- » The winners' names will be published and their stories will be shared in the next issue of *Early Horizons*.

Events and resources

The 54th ECNZ Annual Conference and AGM 2017

Date: 14 and 15 July

Venue: Waipuna Hotel, Auckland

More: www.ecnz.ac.nz/conference

EC Leaders Wellbeing Retreat

Date: July 2017

More: www.bonkersbeat.com/

Email: info@BonkersBeat.com

Inside-Out Nature residential study courses

Dates: October 1 - 4, 2017.

More: www.insideoutnature.com

Early Learning Language Australia: ELLA

ELLA is a fun, digital, play-based language learning program for children in preschool. It is part of the Australian government's commitment to supporting language study in Australia. The program helps children to become more comfortable with different languages early in life so that they can stay engaged with learning languages in later years.

More: www.ella.edu.au

Australian College of Educators - 2017 National Conference

Developed by educators for educators, the conference is aimed at early childhood, primary and secondary teachers as well as tertiary and vocational education and training.

Dates: 3 and 4 July

Place: Melbourne

More: www.austcolled.com.au/events/event/ace-national-conference-2017

Stress management for teachers

Teaching today is harder than it's ever been. In Australia, 41 per cent of teachers report high levels of occupational stress.

Teachers are time poor, drowning in paperwork, meetings, data and assessments. Expectations for student achievement are incredibly high both from school leadership and parents.

Research tells us that a stress management education program strengthens people's mindset—including coping skills—and can prevent and reduce stress. When teachers can equip themselves with stress management techniques, they are prepared for the adversities that they may face.

What can you do?

- » **Begin your day calmly** – At the beginning of your work day, sit for a couple of minutes and listen to soothing music.
- » **Mindfulness** – Sit in a quiet place and train yourself to pay attention to what is happening around you, without judging yourself.
- » **Self acceptance** – Be proud and accept yourself, no matter what. Remind yourself of your value and self worth—notwithstanding others' opinion of you or your achievements (or failures) at work.
- » **Time management** – Write down the three top things you need to get done in order of priority and progress systematically.
- » **Replay past achievements** – Think about positive comments your colleagues and parents have made about your work.
- » **Time out** – If you are feeling overwhelmed take at least an hour to be by yourself, doing things you enjoy.
- » **Support** – Find someone you trust and talk to them about what is distressing you.



Stress management for teachers and principals

A best practice professional development program

More than ever, teachers and principals report feeling stressed and overwhelmed by their workload.

ASG *You Can Do It! Education* is proud to present a comprehensive program of resources that includes skill development booklets, an eLearning audio series and stress relief cards for:

- new and experienced teachers, school leaders, early childhood educators and school principals to use for personal study
- school wide professional staff development

Best practice stress management techniques developed by Professor Michael Bernard, The University of Melbourne

The techniques and skills presented in this program will help your staff, including school leadership, effectively manage the stress of daily work—making work life more enjoyable.



For more information or to purchase Stress Management for Teachers and Principals visit:
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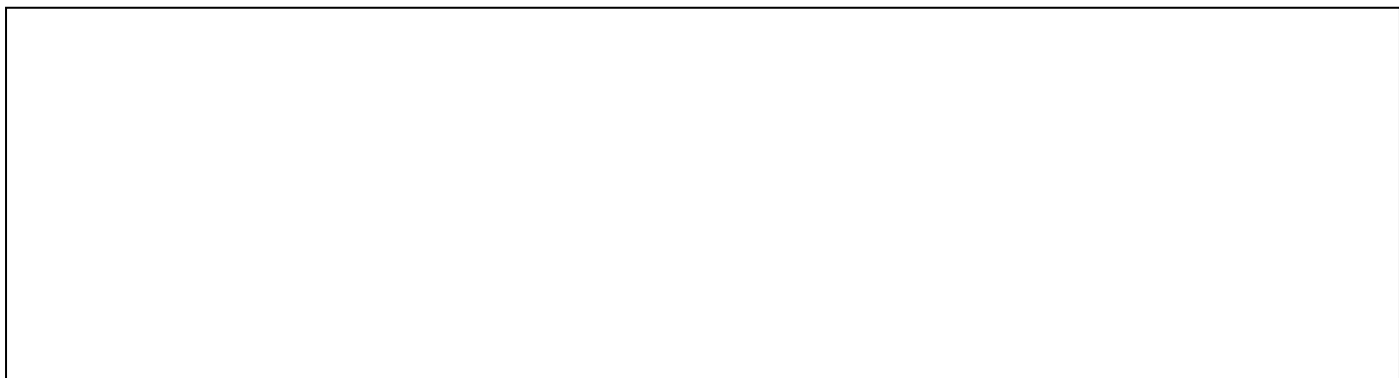
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